Department of Health & Social Care

East Midlands – Moving Well Conference

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CMO Physical Activity Guidelines - 2026 refresh: evidence strengthened, headline advice unchanged

Core recommendations stay the same — the update makes the message more usable and inclusive.

Any activity > none

Biggest health gains come from moving out of inactivity.

Strength 2× weekly

Maintain major muscle groups, balance and independence.

150 mins / week

Still the core moderate activity benchmark, or equivalent vigorous activity.

Break up sedentary time

Reduce prolonged sedentary time; light activity helps.

New emphasis in the update

- Small increases from a low baseline bring real benefits.
- Light activity is recognised as beneficial, especially for inactive, older, disabled or long-term-condition groups.
- Strength and balance are vital across life, including rapid weight loss / GLP-1 contexts.
- Benefits outweigh risks for most people when activity is built up gradually.
- Stronger evidence than previously on the importance of physical activity for women.

Source: CMO Physical activity guidelines update 2026 overview and key messages

Process: how the adult evidence was refreshed

Evidence was gathered through three routes, then screened and integrated into the supporting sections.

1

Academic input

Leading academics recommended studies for inclusion.

2

Australian guidance

Relevant new citations were taken from the March 2026 24-hour movement guidelines.

3

Supplementary searches

Targeted searches covered Dec 2023–Mar 2026 and evidence on smaller increases in activity.

Then:

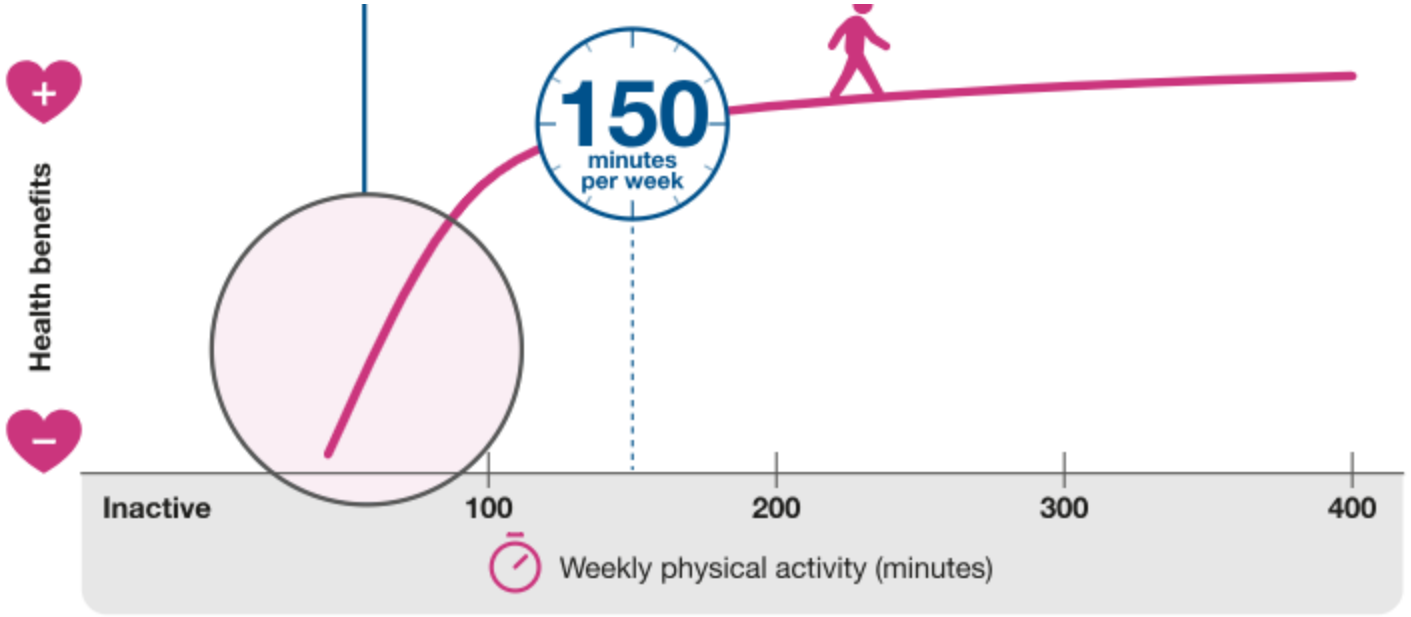
The most relevant recent systematic reviews were identified, integrated into supporting evidence sections and used to update the wider document.

Scope: adult guideline evidence refresh; headline recommendations unchanged.

Some is good, more is better…

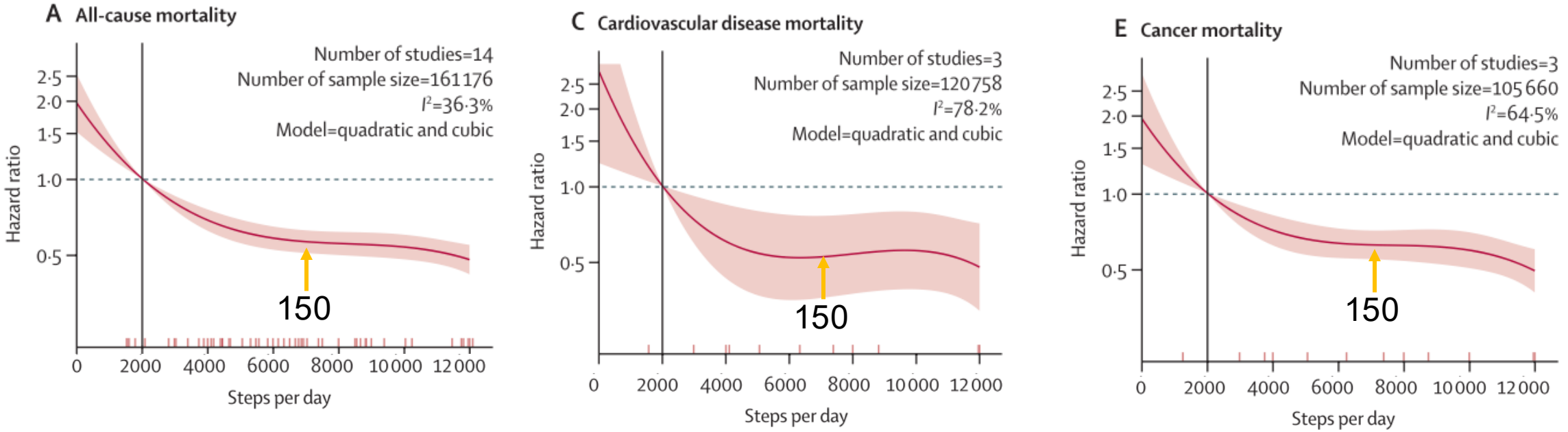
Although we recommend that all individuals work towards achieving these guidelines, there are no absolute thresholds. Benefits are achieved at levels both below and above the guidelines.

In general, the more time spent being physically active, the greater the health benefits. However, the gains are especially significant for those currently doing the lowest levels of activity (fewer than 30 minutes per week), as the improvements in health per additional minute of physical activity will be proportionately greater.



(Garcia et al., 2023)

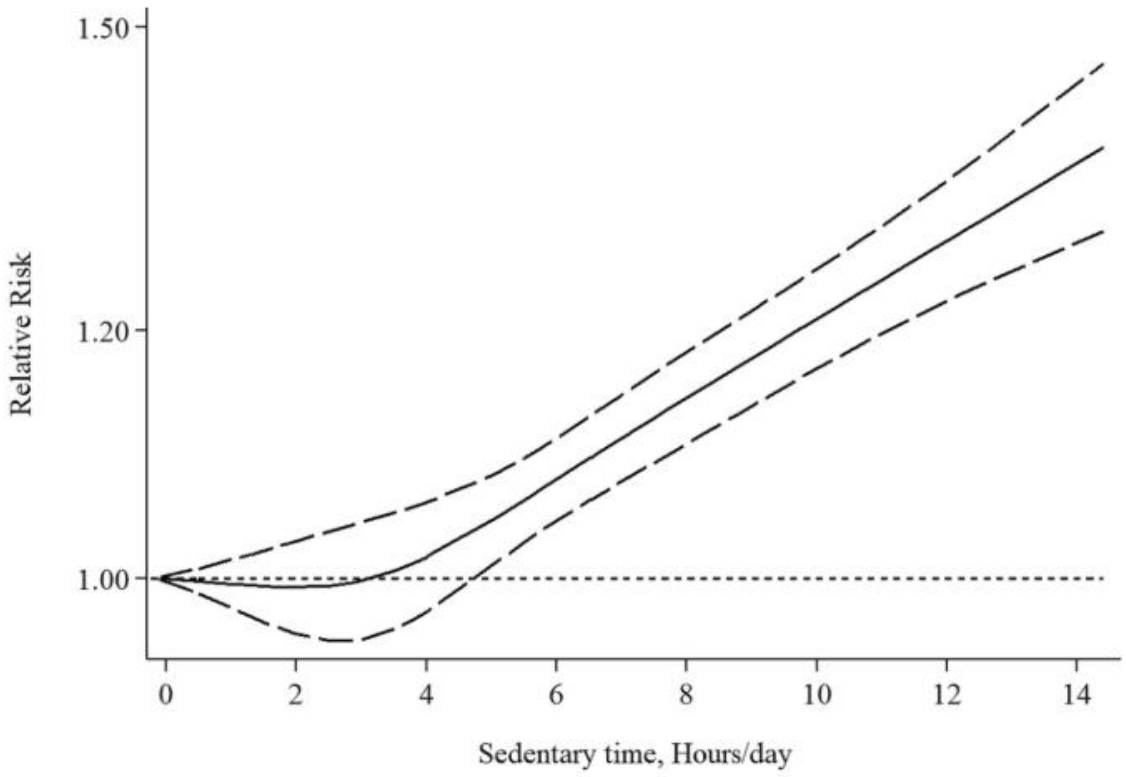
A systematic review including 57 studies and meta-analysis showed more steps per day is associated with reduced mortality.



Graph shows steps per day.
7000-8000 steps per day is considered approximately equivalent to 150 minutes moderate physical activity per week

(Ding et al 2025)

A systematic review and meta-analysis including 27 studies and nearly 1.5 million participants showed that the risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality rises with daily time spent sedentary.

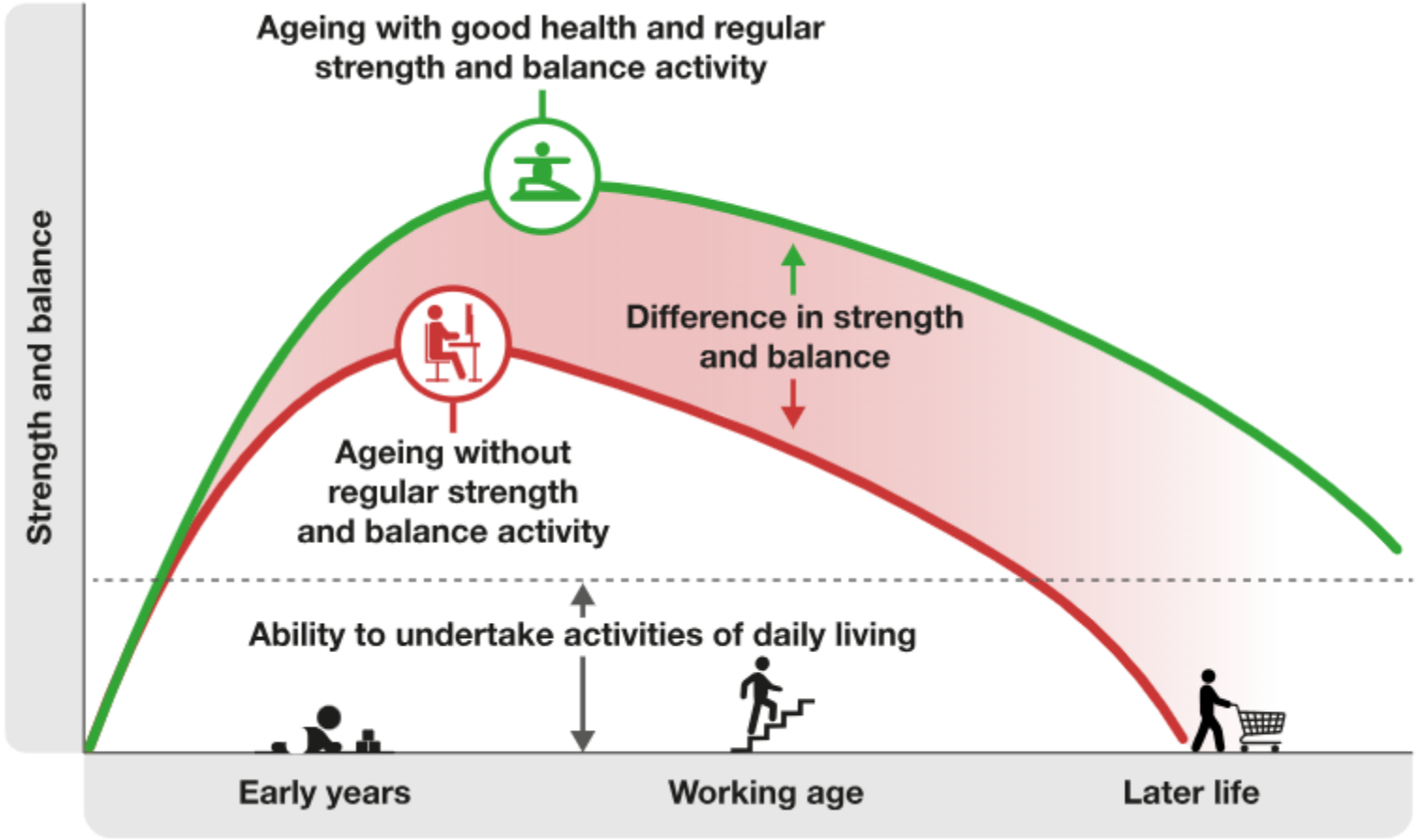


Risk of fatal and non-fatal CVD outcomes by time spent in sedentary time, per day.

(Onagbiye et al, 2023)

Muscle and bone strengthening and balance training activities

Muscle strength, bone health and the ability to balance underpin physical function, particularly later in life. Each attribute contributes independently to overall health and functional ability and in combination they provide lifelong benefits.



(UK CMO Physical activity guidelines: 2026)

Physical Activity has health benefits across the life course; it's cumulative and helps prevent disease and early death.



11 mins a day moderate physical activity

(ie 75 minutes a week, half the CMO's recommended amount) associated with:

23% lower risk of early death.

(A meta-analysis of 196 studies: Garcia et al, Cambridge, 2023)

"If physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure, due to the great many illnesses it can prevent and treat" (CMO 2026)

CMO Guidelines – Life Course Infographics







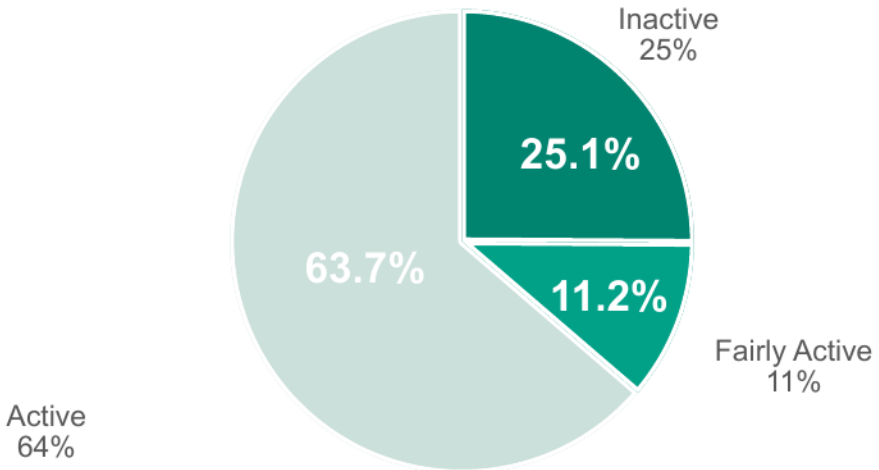
[UK Chief Medical Officer 2026 Physical Activity Life Stage Infographics | UK Chief Medical Officer Physical Activity Guideline Infographics | Campaign Resource Centre]

A sizeable proportion of the English population is not physically active, and many adults and children do not do the amount of physical activity recommended.

Close to **4 in 10 adults** do not achieve 150+ minutes of activity a week



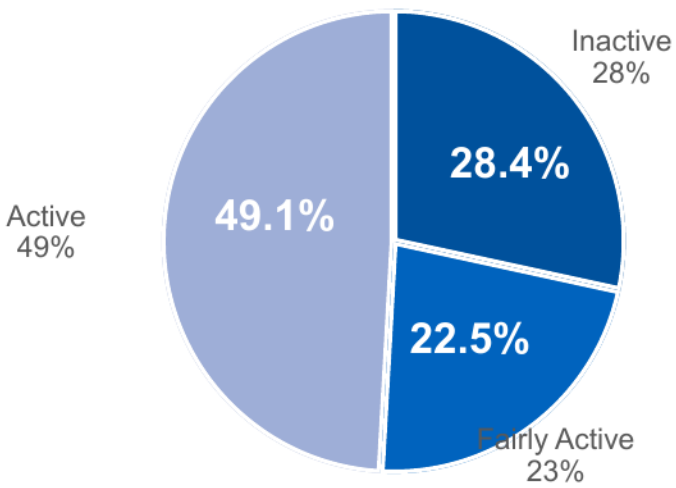
Specifically, **11.8 million adults** in England are **inactive**



Just over **half of children** do not achieve an average of 60+ minutes of activity a day



In detail, **2.1 million children** in England are **less active**



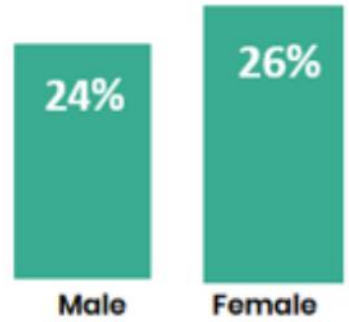
Based on Sport England (2025), Active Lives Adult Survey & Sport England (2025), Active Lives Children and Young People Survey

The 11.8 million inactive adults in England include people from the following groups:

Percentage of different groups that are inactive, i.e. completing average of less than 30 minutes a week

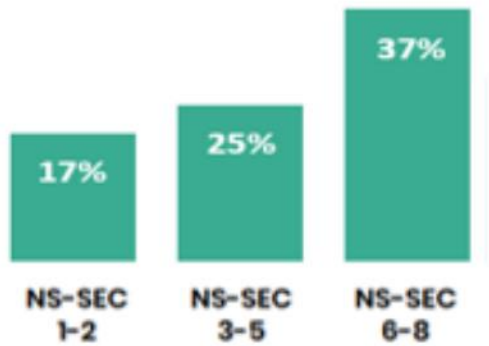
1 Gender

Women (26% or 6.3m) are more likely to be inactive than men (24% or 5.4m).



2 Socio-economic groups

Those in routine/ semi-routine jobs and those who are long-term unemployed or have never worked are the most likely to be inactive (37%)



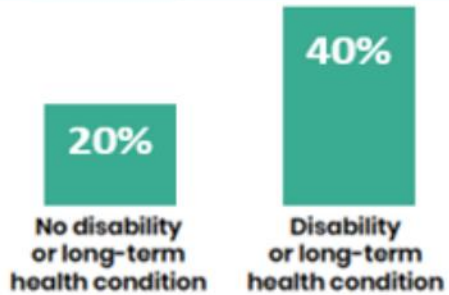
3 Age

Inactivity levels generally increase with age, with the sharpest increase coming at age 75+ (44%).



4 Disability and long-term health conditions

Inactivity is more common for disabled people or those with a long-term health condition (40%) than those without (20%)



5 Ethnicity

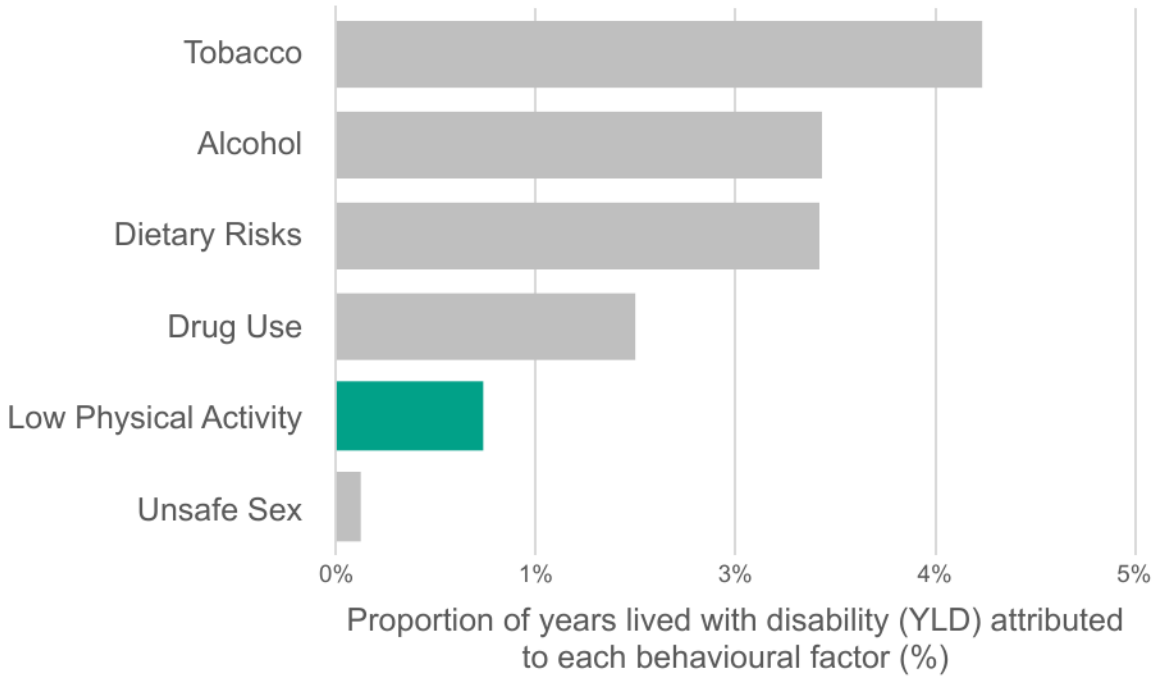
There are differences in activity levels based on ethnic background.



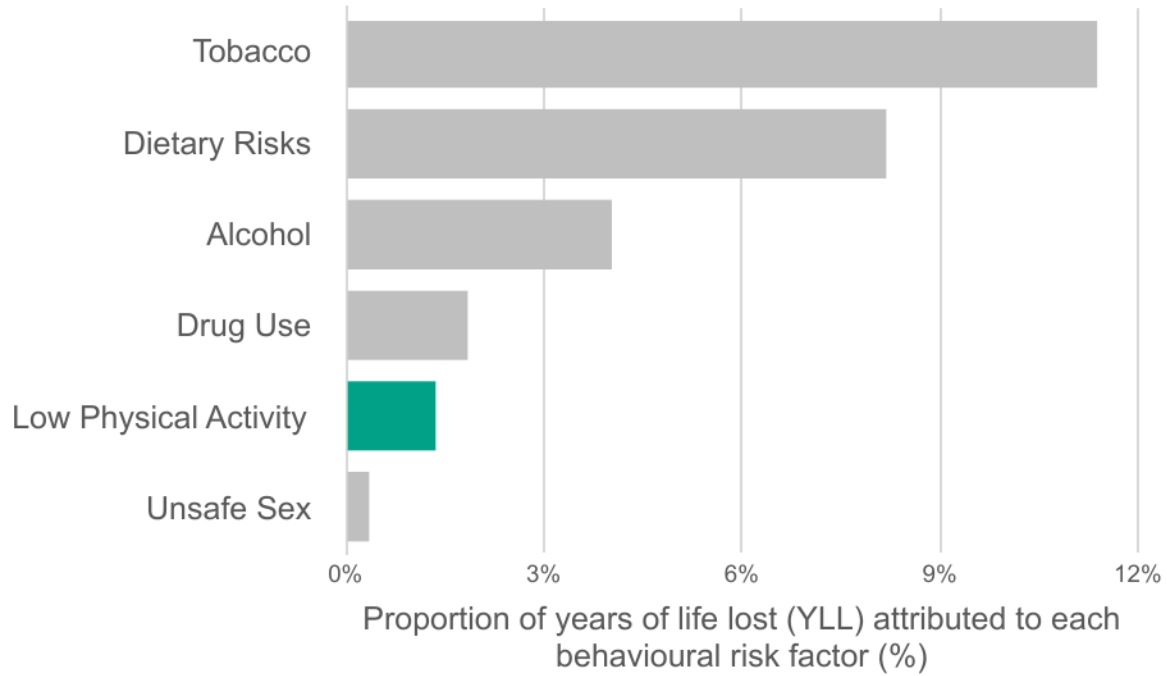
Sport England (2025), Active Lives Adults Survey

Low physical activity can significantly impact the years people live in good health

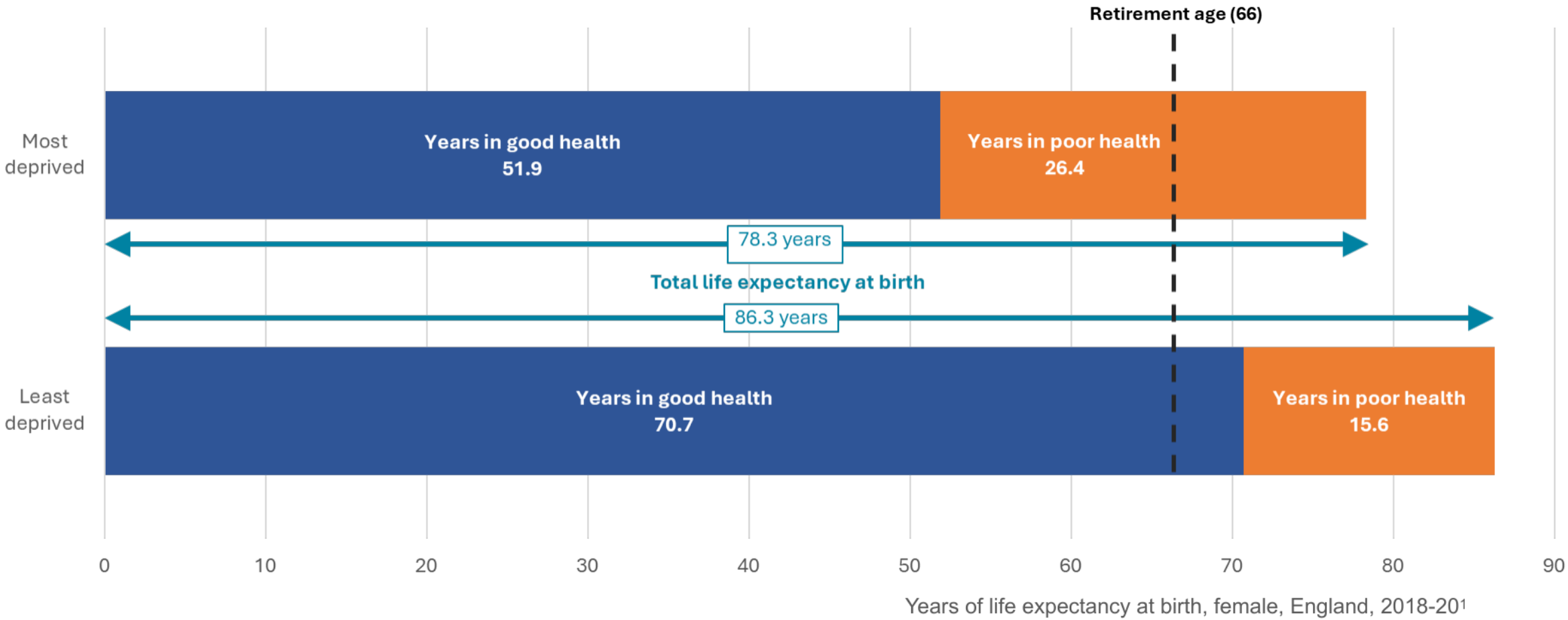
Low physical activity accounts for **74,000 years lived with disability** (impact illness)



Low physical activity accounts for **137,000 preventable years of life lost** (premature mortality)

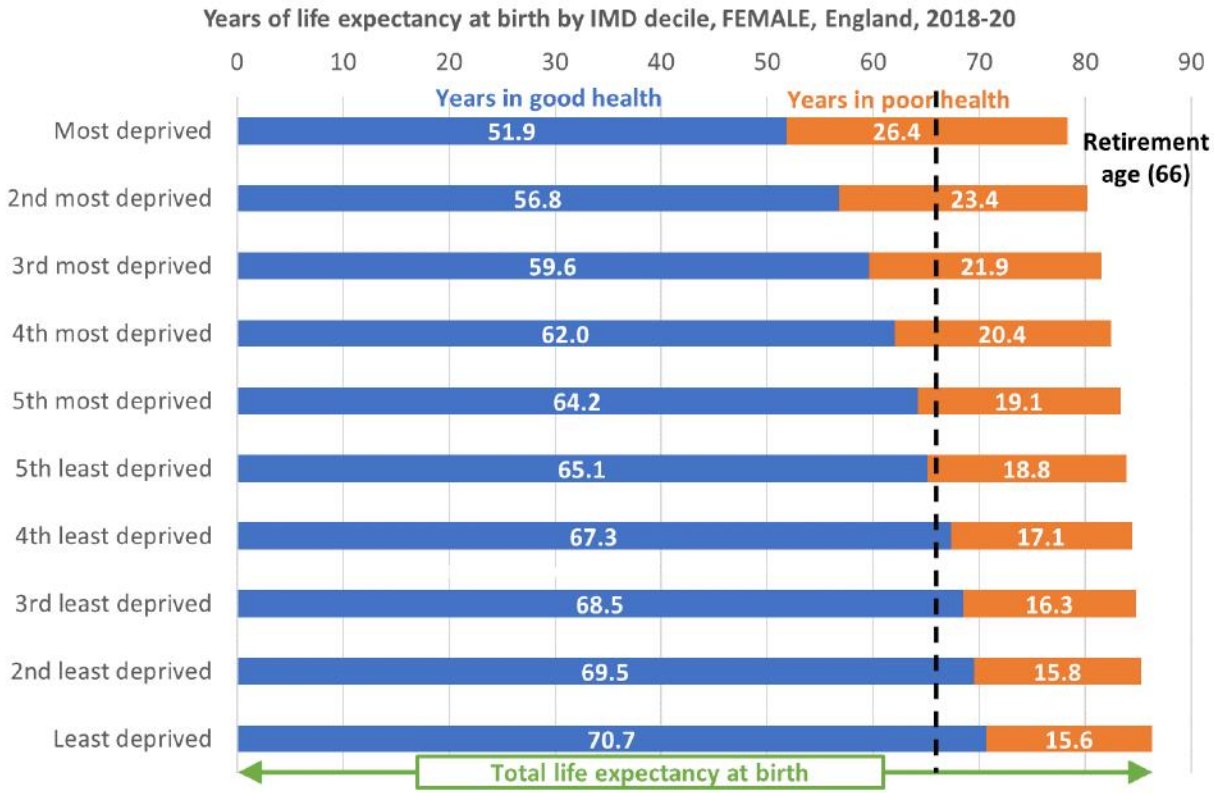


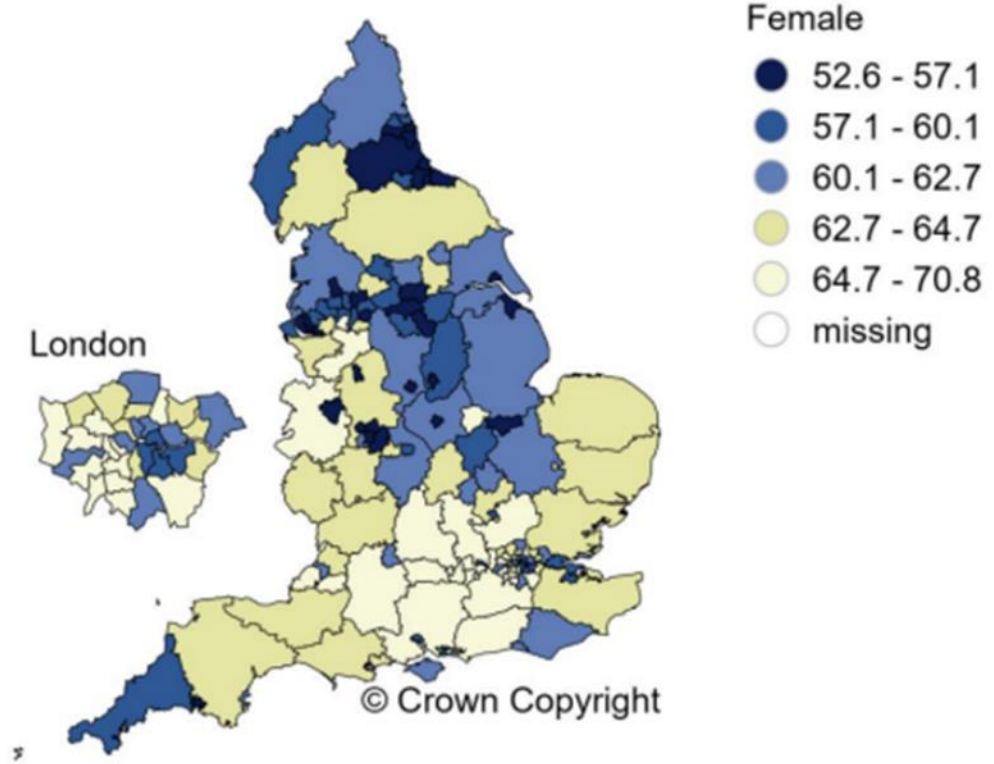
There are inequalities in how many years we spend in ill health – and how long we live: physical activity plays a role



Years of life expectancy at birth, female, England, 2018-20[1]

- with a clear gradient across areas of deprivation





Data source: Health state life expectancies by national deprivation deciles, England: 2018 to 2020 - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

Moving more as a golden thread across policies and organisations

